

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY GABORONE
INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

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E.O. 11652:GDS

TAGS: PINS, BC, UK

SUBJECT: STATUS OF BOTSWANA'S REQUEST FOR SECURITY
ASSISTANCE

REF: A) GABORONE 1894; B) MASERU 1126

1. DEPT APPRECIATES INFO IN REF (B), WHICH GIVES US
CONSIDERABLY CLEARER PICTURE OF BOTSWANA'S MILITARY
NEEDS, PREFERENCES AND OPTIONS. THIS IS ESSENTIAL
BEFORE DECISION PROCESS CAN GO FORWARD, SINCE BOTSWANA'S
REQUEST COMES AT A TIME WHEN WE ARE STRIVING TO IMPLEMENT
ANNOUNCED POLICY OF CURBING INCREASE IN US ARMS SALES
AND SUPPLY RELATIONSHIPS WORLD-WIDE. THE ARGUMENTS FOR
RESPONDING TO BOTSWANA'S REQUEST ARE IMPRESSIVE, BUT A
FAVORABLE DECISION FACES SERIOUS DIFFICULTIES STEMMING
FROM OUR COMMITMENT TO THIS POLICY AND FROM UNRESOLVED
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QUESTIONS ABOUT ITS LONG-TERM IMPLICATIONS FOR OUR
INVOLVEMENT IN SOUTHERN AFRICA.

2. THE GOB'S REQUEST HAS NOT BEEN VETOED AT ANY STAGE
OF THE PROCESS SO FAR. SYMPATHY FOR BOTSWANA'S POSITION
HAS, IF ANYTHING, BEEN ENHANCED BY TIBONE'S FRANK
ASSERTION (REF A) THAT THE GOB IS MAKING A CONSCIOUS

POLITICAL CHOICE WITH A VIEW TOWARD LONG RUN DEVELOPMENTS

IN TURNING TO THE U.S. FOR ARMS. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE FEELING HERE RESISTS PLACING DECISION IN CONTEXT OF RECENT INCIDENTS ON RHODESIAN BORDER. DESPITE EMPATHY FOR HOW SKIRMISHES MUST LOOK IN BOTSWANA'S PERSPECTIVE, U.S. DECISION MUST BE MADE IN TERMS OF LONG-RANGE MUTUAL SECURITY INTERESTS AND CONTRIBUTION TO REGIONAL PEACE. IN THIS REGARD, BOTSWANA'S OBVIOUS DETERMINATION TO MAINTAIN MULTI-RACIAL DEMOCRACY AND ACTIVELY SUPPORT MODERATE SOLUTIONS TO REGION'S PROBLEMS ARE HIGHLY FAVORABLE FACTOR. NEVERTHELESS, THERE REMAIN SERIOUS MISGIVINGS HERE ABOUT THE STRATEGIC WISDOM AND THE POLITICAL FEASIBILITY OF A PRESIDENTIAL DETERMINATION AUTHORIZING INTRODUCTION OF US ARMS INTO THIS AREA.

3. AMONG ALTERNATIVES UNDER CONSIDERATION HERE ARE (A) ENCOURAGING BRITISH TO SHOULDER PRINCIPAL PORTION OF BOTSWANA'S DEFENSE NEEDS; AND (B) INCREASING NON-MILITARY AID TO HELP BOTSWANA SHIFT RESOURCES TO THE BDF WITH MINIMAL INJURY TO ITS DEVELOPMENT BUDGET. IN VIEW OF HISTORIC BRITISH INTEREST AND RESPONSIBILITY IN BOTSWANA, AND SINCE LEVELS OF US AID PROPOSED FOR FY 78 ALREADY REPRESENT SHARP INCREASES, THERE IS STRONG SENTIMENT DEVELOPING IN FAVOR OF OPTION (A). IN ORDER
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TO HELP DETERMINE ITS LIKELY FEASIBILITY, EMBASSY LONDON IS BEING ASKED FOR ITS REALISTIC ASSESSMENT OF MAXIMUM POTENTIAL BRITISH CONTRIBUTION IN THE WAKE OF UK MILITARY MISSION'S REPORT.

4. ABOVE IS BY WAY OF STATUS REPORT TO INSURE THAT YOU ARE KEPT INFORMED OF DECISION PROCESS HERE INCLUDING PROSPECTS, ALTERNATIVES AND OBSTACLES. YOU MAY KEEP THIS IN MIND IF GOB OFFICIALS PRESS THEIR INQUIRY ABOUT THE STATUS OF THEIR REQUEST MAKING CLEAR AS APPROPRIATE THAT DESPITE OUR FUNDAMENTAL SYMPATHY TOWARD THEIR POSITION, THERE ARE FORMIDABLE DIFFICULTIES WE WOULD FACE IN PROVIDING ARMS -- DIFFICULTIES THAT MUST BE DEALT WITH IN CONSIDERING THEIR REQUEST. VANCE

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